

Leadership contest would be catastrophic, says Davis

Henry Zeffman Political Reporter

David Davis and Priti Patel left the door open to Tory leadership challenges yesterday as rumours swirled about possible successors to Theresa May. Mr Davis, the Brexit secretary, warned that an imminent leadership

contest would have “catastrophic” consequences for Britain’s EU withdrawal negotiations, but stopped short of ruling out a leadership bid.

Ms Patel, the international development secretary, also refused to deny harbouring leadership ambitions.

Asked if such a contest would be

catastrophic for the Brexit talks, Mr Davis said: “Yes. Yes. Listen: let me be absolutely plain about this. Number one, I happen to think we’ve got a very good prime minister.

“I know she is coming under a lot of pressure at the moment, but I have seen her in action ... and I think she’s very

good, she makes good decisions, she’s bold, she takes her time. It’s very, very, very clear that she’s a good prime minister.

“Point number two is I want a stable backdrop to this Brexit negotiation.”

Mr Davis told the BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show* that his “message” to Conservatives planning leadership challenges was: “Stop being so self-indulgent. Get on with the day job.”

He added: “The more self-indulgent narcissism you go in for the more difficult you make it to do our proper job.”

Mr Davis, 68, was urged to run for leader at a meeting of more than 40 Tory MPs on Wednesday. Sir Desmond Swayne, a former parliamentary aide to David Cameron, reportedly said that he was the best candidate.

The Brexit secretary, who has stood unsuccessfully in two contests, said that he had responded that “our job is to support the prime minister and make Brexit work, not anything else.”

Asked if he would rule out standing again, Mr Davis said: “No, look, I’m not going to get into it. It’s self-indulgent. Frankly the fact that we have spent two minutes on it is self-indulgent.”

Another idea being considered by ministers would involve Philip Hammond, the chancellor, being elevated to the leadership, with Mr Davis continuing as Brexit secretary and becoming deputy prime minister.

A minister said that Mr Hammond, 61, was “the only plausible candidate for a couple of years”, and could announce he would stand down after two years.

Other MPs reportedly want to skip a generation and install a leader from the 2010 parliamentary intake. “We need Year Zero, a real radical revolution,” an MP was reported to have said.

Candidates could include Sajid Javid, the communities secretary, Dominic Raab, the justice minister, and Ms Patel.

Ms Patel, 45, did not deny leadership ambitions, saying only: “I am talking about getting on with doing the job that not just myself but other colleagues are involved in.”

The reports came as recriminations over the election campaign that left Mrs May’s leadership so precarious intensified. A former speechwriter for Mrs May said that her departed chiefs of staff, Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy, were “high-handed and contemptuous” and “breathhtakingly rude.”

Alasdair Palmer, who worked for Mrs May at the Home Office, said the pair were “hostile and difficult to deal with”.

Mr Timothy and Ms Hill left their posts after the election and were replaced by Gavin Barwell, a former minister who lost his seat at the election.

Downing Street has filled the vacant head of policy position with a centrist former aide to the Cameron government. James Marshall has replaced John Godfrey, who joined Mrs May’s team from Legal and General last year.

Between 2011 and 2016, Mr Marshall was a special adviser to the leader of the House of Lords and then to government chief whips, including Michael Gove. “He understands the delivery arm of policy and how you work with parliament to turn it into legislation,” a Downing Street source said.

A Conservative insider said Mr Marshall was “super-friendly and very well-liked”. He was previously on the executive committee of Bright Blue, a pressure group on the left of the Conservative Party.

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David Davis said that there was too much at stake to change leader now, as a tired-looking Theresa May and husband, Philip, attended church yesterday. Jacob Rees-Mogg, on Peston on Sunday, also seemed to have a lot on his plate, albeit bacon sandwiches

Welby seeks cross-party group to guide Brexit

Henry Zeffman

Theresa May should form a cross-party commission on Brexit to draw the “poison” out of the negotiations, the Archbishop of Canterbury has said.

The Most Rev Justin Welby said Brexit would be “a disaster if our negotiators ... go into the room without confidence in their backing in the UK.”

The archbishop, who voted Remain in last June’s referendum, wrote in *The Mail on Sunday*: “We must develop some political tool which can hold the ring for the differences to be fought out. The future of this country is not a zero-sum, winner-takes-all calculation, but must rest on the reconciled common good arrived at through good debate

and disagreement. It would need to be cross-party and chaired by a senior politician, on privy council terms. It could not bind parliament, but it could draw much of the poison from the debate.”

The idea of convening a broad-based group has gained traction in the wake of Mrs May’s general election failure to secure a clear majority.

Lord Hague of Richmond, the former foreign secretary, urged the government earlier this month to “call in the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the TUC, the first ministers of the devolved governments, and the leaders of all the opposition parties”, while Yvette Cooper, the Labour MP, called for a “small cross-party commission to conduct the negotiations”. The former Labour minister Lord Adonis suggested Sir John Major, the former prime minister, could chair inter-party talks on the Brexit strategy.

Though the government has stopped short of establishing a cross-party commission, David Davis, the Brexit secretary, has told colleagues he wants Sir Keir Starmer, his shadow, to be appointed to the privy council so he can be briefed on confidential and sensitive elements of the talks.

Unions urge Corbyn to fight for single market membership

Billy Kenber

Jeremy Corbyn is under growing pressure to push for a soft Brexit, as trade unions joined the movement calling for Labour to keep open the possibility of freedom of movement despite promising in its manifesto that it would end.

Baroness Chakrabarti, the shadow attorney general, said Labour would be prepared to give up “complete control” of borders if that secured tariff-free access to the single market, as the “economy comes first”. Free movement could continue under another name when Britain left, she suggested.

Lady Chakrabarti told Sky’s *Sophy Ridge on Sunday* that the party would prioritise the economy over tackling immigration.

She said: “We haven’t said we’d have control of free movement of people, you can’t necessarily have complete control. What we want is to be able to have fair migration that avoids people’s jobs being undercut.”

JEFF OVERS/BBC/PA; KEN MCKAY/ITV/REVIEWS/SHUTTERSTOCK; DAVID HARTLEY



Tory election guru wanted May to call Scottish referendum

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Theresa May was urged by Sir Lynton Crosby to call a second referendum on Scottish independence before Brexit is completed, *The Times* has learnt.

As Nicola Sturgeon prepares to drop her two-year timetable for a new poll, a leaked memo prepared by the Conservatives’ election supremo shows that he told the party to “harness the uncertainty caused by Brexit and use it to secure support for the status quo”.

The first minister is due to make a statement to MSPs this week explaining what she intends to do about her demand earlier this year for another poll on Scotland’s future. In that address, Ms Sturgeon is expected to announce a partial reversal: ditching the two-year timetable but keeping the option of a fresh poll on the table.

Ms Sturgeon went into this month’s election campaign demanding that Scots be given a say on their future between the autumn of next year and the spring of 2019. That position was announced in March, when the first minister said Scotland should be offered a choice between the “hard Brexit” being pursued by Mrs May and becoming independent.

The next day, Sir Lynton sent a memo to senior figures in Conservative campaign headquarters (CCHQ), suggesting that Mrs May agree to a referendum before the end of the Brexit negotiations.

A referendum held at the time of Ms Sturgeon’s announcement, he said, would probably have resulted in a victory for the unionist side. The SNP’s demand for a new poll, he added, was “out of line with soft voters’ preference”.

Nevertheless, he said, “while it may seem sensible to delay a referendum until after Brexit negotiations are complete this is not necessarily the best

strategic position to adopt”. He wrote: “Holding a referendum on independence before Brexit is complete will mean that voters have to grapple with the uncertainty of the outcome of Brexit in addition to the uncertainty of their choice in the referendum.

“Delaying the referendum until after Brexit is complete removes one of these unknowns.”

Sir Lynton, who was hired to work on Mrs May’s disastrous election campaign, added that “a Brexit outcome that may not match the outlook of Scottish voters could easily result in Scotland voting for independence”.

However, the prime minister does not appear to have been convinced. Two days later, she formally rejected Ms Sturgeon’s timetable for a referendum and suggested that any new vote would have to be held after Brexit.

The loss of 21 seats to all the unionist parties in that election has changed opinion within the SNP. Ms Sturgeon has promised to reflect on the substantial gains made at the party’s expense before announcing the way forward.

It is understood that the first minister addressed this issue at a recent meeting of the SNP’s ruling national executive committee. The activists on the committee urged Ms Sturgeon to keep a referendum on the table as “an insurance policy” but to ditch the timetable, which many felt was restrictive.

A spokesman for Ms Sturgeon dismissed claims that the first minister was about to reject her timetable as “entirely speculative”.

But it is understood that she will refuse to rule out a future poll when she addresses MSPs this week while agreeing to leave the issue until after the Brexit process is complete.

There is a belief within the SNP that Scots could turn towards independence if the Brexit process starts to go badly.

Sir Lynton did not respond to a request to comment.

Experts warn of chaotic fallout from nuclear plan

Francis Elliott Political Editor

Britain’s Brexit plan will plunge its nuclear power plants, cancer treatment centres and leading research facilities into chaos within two years, according to a secret government assessment.

The UK plans to pull out of Euratom, Europe’s nuclear body, at the same time as it leaves the EU in 2019. A bill to replace European safeguards with a British system of oversight was published in last week’s Queen’s Speech. However, experts say that this would not match the regime provided by the EU body, meaning that plants, research facilities and hospitals may be unable to import radioactive material after Brexit.

Officials from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy have warned that it will take seven years to replace the current set of agreements, *The Times* has been told. The delay would partly be caused by the fact that work on new international treaties, for example with the US and Japan, cannot start until new inspections standards are approved.

Ministers have suggested that, as with financial regulations, there could be a transition period after Brexit to allow a new regime to be put in place, but experts say that the complexity of the task is still not sufficiently realised.

The Nuclear Industry Association (NIA) will today step up calls for David Davis, the Brexit secretary, to consider asking for Britain to remain an associate member of Euratom instead. That option will worry some Tory MPs, because some lawyers believe that it would require oversight by the European Court of Justice or even for Britain to continue to take part in elections to the European parliament.

Tom Greatrex, the NIA chief executive, said the plans did not “come anywhere close” to matching the scale of the problem. “If the government wants to minimise disruption to economic activity, jobs and growth, then seeking a deal to stay in Euratom is the infinitely preferable option,” he said.

A government spokesman said: “In last week’s Queen’s Speech, this government made clear our commitment to establishing a UK nuclear safeguards regime as we leave the European Union and Euratom. There will be no immediate changes to the UK’s safeguards arrangements, the exact details of which will be subject to detailed consultation with the regulator, industry and international partners.”



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